



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Subcommittee seeks federal funding for Navajo Indian Irrigation Project

FARMINGTON N.M. – The 23rd Navajo Nation Council continued its efforts on Tuesday to coordinate with Navajo Agricultural Products Industry to push for the completion of the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project and to increase funding for operations and maintenance costs for the benefit of NAPI and the Navajo Nation.

Speaker LoRenzo Bates, along with Council Delegates Benjamin Bennett, Tom Chee, Kee Allen Begay, Jr., Davis Filfred, and Otto Tso met with

NAPI CEO Wilton Charley and operations and maintenance manager Lionel Haskie to discuss the shortfall in federal funding for operations and maintenance expenses for the NIIP infrastructure.

The federal government is obligated through Public Law 87-483, passed by Congress in 1962, to provide O&M funding each year through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, however, federal funding has decreased from approximately \$24 million annually to a current low of \$3.7 million. The law passed by Congress also obligated the federal government to provide funding to complete the final three 10,000-acre blocks of the NIIP, which has yet to be completed.

NAPI has the capacity of farming approximately 110,000 acres of land, however, due to the failure of the federal government to complete Blocks 9, 10, and 11, the enterprise is not able to reach its full capacity in terms of revenue, production, and job creation.

On April 13, the Navajo Nation Council's Naabik'iyáti' Committee approved legislation that created the NIIP Negotiation Subcommittee for the purpose of negotiating an MOA with the federal government regarding the funding and completion of the NIIP, to advocate for O&M funding, and other funding through the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act.



PHOTO: Members of the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project negotiation subcommittee view the deteriorating canal at NIIP on April 25, 2017.

The subcommittee members include Council Delegates Steven Begay, Benjamin Bennett, Kee Allen Begay, Jr., Leonard Tsosie, and Speaker Bates.

Following the meeting, the subcommittee members were led on a tour of the NIIP to see firsthand the infrastructure including the water canal that continues to deteriorate each year, and also to see NAPI's ongoing initiatives, which includes the introduction of organic crop production.

"The purpose of today's visit was to provide firsthand knowledge for the subcommittee in order to help us move the initiatives of NAPI forward," said Speaker Bates.



PHOTO: A portion of the deteriorated water canal at the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project negotiation on April 25, 2017.

Operations and maintenance manager Lionel Haskie, said that NAPI has put forth its own funding and labor for O&M due to the lack of adequate funding from the BIA each year rather than having the infrastructure continue to deteriorate.

Haskie estimates that it will cost NAPI approximately \$3 million to fix a 1,000-foot portion of the water canal, which should be paid for by the BIA with federal funding in accordance with Public Law 87-483. He also noted that NAPI is assuming the responsibility of maintaining the roads within the 80,000-acre farm, which is also the BIA's obligation.

Although NAPI is spending millions of dollars each year on O&M costs, the enterprise continues to advance further development including a new 120-acre field that will be used to grow and produce organic products such as melons, onions, and squash.

NAPI officials said they plan to market their organic products on the open market and would also like to partner with local schools and grocery stores to make their products available to students and local community members.

At the conclusion of the tour, the subcommittee members and NAPI officials said they look forward to meeting and working together to pursue the completion of Block 9 and to increase federal funding for operations and maintenance expenses. The subcommittee is tentatively scheduled to meet again in May.

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